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ABSTRACT

The Type A behavior pattern is defined as an action-emotion complex that can be observed in any person who is aggressively involved in a chronic, incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time, and if required to do so, against the opposing efforts of other things or persons. The dimensions of this coronary-prone behavior were further explicated by examining how Type A and Type B college students differentially responded to and interpreted social cues of approval. Subjects (N=126), classified as either Type A or Type B, were assigned to two conditions, i.e., high task importance or moderate task importance, and viewed a videotape of vignettes labeled clearly approval, no approval, or ambiguous remarks, of a professor commenting to a student about a paper. Results indicated that substantial differences existed in how Type A and Type B individuals perceived approval-rated vignettes, but no apparent differences in how they perceived no approval-rated vignettes. Data suggest that A's, in the high importance condition, and to a lesser extent in the moderate importance condition, respond to the approval-rated vignettes with significantly less certainty that approval has been given, than the B's. (PAS)

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Social cues of approval: Reactions and perceptions of the Type A individual

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Social cues of approval: Reactions and perceptions of the Type A individual

Friedman and Rosenman (1959) have pioneered the research on the relationship between Pattern A and the incidence of cardiovascular disease. The Type A behavior pattern is defined as "an action-emotion complex that can be observed in any person who is aggressively involved in a chronic, incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and leass time, and if required to do so, against the opposing efforts of other things or persons" (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974, p.67). Systematic investigations by Glass and his colleagues have verified the existence of a number of behavioral manifestations of this pattern (cf. Glass, 1977).

In reviewing these findings, Glass (1977) and others (Dembroski, Weiss, Shields, Haynes, & Feinlieb, 1978; Pittner & Houston, 1980) propose that the Type A behavior pattern may be thought of as a response style which the individual adopts as a means of coping with his or her perceived lack of control over environmental stress, and which is aimed at asserting and maintaining control. The behavior pattern is regarded as the outcome of a person-situation interaction; situations which may challenge one's belief in personal control (e.g., uncontrollable stress or challenge of task performance) produce competitiveness, impatience, and hostility in Type A individuals. These behaviors represent an attempt to regain the sense of personal control over the environment. For the Type B individual the need for personal control may be less important; thus their appraisal of the stressful situation is less threatening to them and they manifest fewer behavioral correlates of the coronary-prone personality. Rosenman and Friedman (1974) note, for example, that not only do Type B individuals have significantly less risk of coronary heart disease, but they are freer of such enhanced personality and behavioral traits.

It appears that Type A's maintain a feeling of time urgency and make difficult demands on themselves by imposing on themselves short deadlines, extreme standards of evaluation and excessive striving for achievement (Glass, 1977). Since the atheroschlerotic process develops over a relatively extended period of time, and since recent coronary angiographic evidence has demonstrated that the process is significantly more fully developed in Type A's than B's (Jenkins, 1976), it is possible that reductions in the type of day-to-day stress that is potentially damaging to the cardiovascular system can have a significant clinical impact in the long run.

There are no empirical data as yet as to whether Type A's inhabit objectively more stressful environments than do Type B's. Howard, Cunningham, and Rechnitzer (1976), however, have suggested that Type A behaviors might be elicited by the demands of the job situation. Their study, however, was correlational and it is impossible to establish the extent to which the subject's work load was imposed by the situation rather than by the Type A's themselves.

The conditions of social living, including those of competition and frustration, produce many stresses for the individual. He or she will respond to that stress physiologically, psychologically, and socially. These responses are particularly likely to be evoked in achievement situations (Atkinson, 1967). To understand the behavioral antecedents of coronary heart disease (CHD), it is important to first understand the dynamics of the achievement situation. This situation, and the stresses associated with it, must be viewed in terms of a transaction between the individual and his or her tasks. To focus exclusively on the personality of the individual or on the demands of his or her tasks is to diminish the compexity of the interactions between the two. It is in this person-environment interaction that the stresses related to CHD seem to arise.

The contmporary environment which has been associated with CHD incidence has generally encouraged Type A behavior because it appears to offer special

rewards to those who can perform rapidly and aggressively. Moreover, with increasing urbanization and technological advances, as well as increasing population density, our modern civilization presents unique challenges never experienced by earlier, less time-conscious generations. Thus, Type A behavior does not stem solely from an individual's personality, but it emerges when certain challenges or conditions of milieu arise to elicit this complex of responses in susceptible individuals. In this interplay of personality traits in a modern environmental milieu, Type A's may lack subtle adaptive response and usually exhibit hostility, chronic impatience, excessive achievement-striving, and a strong sense of time urgency. On the other hand, the Type B individual seems to be basically free of such response tendencies, generally feels no pressing conflicts with either time or persons, and is, therefore, without an habitual sense of time urgency.

The tendency to strive, to assert and maintain control over one's environment, often leads Type A individuals to overwork and overcompensate in their everyday lives to ensure that they are, in fact, in control. Previous research (Pittner & Houston, 1980) suggests that the difficult demands Type A's make on themselves does not necessarily result in better performance than that of Type B's; and, thus, the physiological cost does not end in greater benefit. Subsequently, this must lead to increased personal tension and distress for the Type A individual.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to further explicate the dimensions of coronary-prone behavior by examining how Type A and Type B college students may differentiably respond to and interpret a given situation that commonly occurs in their everyday world - the receipt of critical feedback from an instructor. It was designed to assess the extent to which there are differences in how Type A's and B's perceive social cues that are present and readily available in person-situation environmental interactions.

It has been sufficiently demonstrated that individual differences in modes of perceptual processing are related to personality characteristics (cf. Witkin &

Goodenough. 1977). An assumption can be made that if an individual is unable to appropriately detect such social cues of approval, then that individual may be creating an additional source of stress in his or her life. These situations are particularly relevant when the social cues are ambiguous.

For example, if individuals in a work situation are unable to appropriately detect or determine from the verbal and nonverbal messages elicited by a supervisor that their work is indeed satisfactory, these individuals may feel a need to do more and more to gain that approval. Take another example of the graduate student who is working on his or her thesis or dissertation. The student needs to meet periodically with the major professor for feedback on the progress that is or is not being made. If the student is unable to appropriately detect or interpret the social cues of approval/disapproval, he or she may be prone to misinterpreting constructive criticism as disapproval. With this in mind, the student retreats to his or her office and rewrites the entire firts three chapters, extending the page length by ten pages, just to be sure! Not being able to determine in this case that he or she had done enough and needed only to work on some minor rewrites, has added additional stress and anxiety, not to count the energy and drive levels that have been diminished in this person's life.

The individual who fails to comply with social demands will typically experience such distressing consequences as withholding of an expected reward or expressions of disapproval. On the other hand, compliance with social demands usually leads to rewards - either the attainment of some valued objective (e.g., a good grade or a promotion) or of social approval. The approval of others is a most important social objective, since most satisfactions in life arise from a social climate of positive reward, and most negative conditions of life stem from negative reward.

Approval itself may become a vital goal to some persons, perhaps because it symbolizes safety from harm or threat. Excessive seeking of approval, however, can interfere with creativity and effectiveness and can result in a bland, conforming

individual who experiences tension and distress. Thus, while the expectations of others serve as pressing social demands for almost everyone because favorable personal outcomes are in some degree tied to compliance, for some people the need for approval from significant others makes those demands particularly burdensome.

If clues of social approval are ambiguous or unclear, they may be misinterpreted by some individuals as conveying a disapproval message. Disapproval by itself is a threat to one's sense of self-esteem and is stressful in nature. Disapproval denotes failure to many people; and failure as a threat to one's sense of control is likely to be stressful. Type A's appear to be sensitive to threats of loss of control. The behavior pattern, as mentioned previously, represents a response style aimed at asserting and maintaining control over stressful aspects of the environment.

The present study explores the general hypothesis that Type A and Type B college students differentially respond to and interpret social cues within their environment. It is unclear as to what the critical experimental variables, and their manner of operation are, as they interact with the Type A behavior pattern upon exposure to interpersonal social cues (i.e., approval) that are ambiguous or nonambiguous in nature. Therefore, this study explores and discusses this interaction.

Method

Subjects were 126 undergraduate students enrolled in educational psychology courses at Kansas State University. These students were offered course credit for their participation. Prior to the experiment, a college student version of the Jenkins Activity Survey (JAS-T) (Glass, 1977) was administered during a pretesting session. Subjects, classified as either Type A (N=60) or Type B (N=66), viewed a videotape, containing 52 vignettes, of a female graduate teaching assistant, role-playing a college professor ostensibly commenting to a student about a submitted paper. Half of the vignettes were rated as indicating ap-

proval remarks and the other half of the vignettes were rated as indicating no approval remarks. Subjects were asked to pretend that they were the student the professor was talking to, and to rate the vignettes on the degree of approval they felt was being conveyed to them. In addition, subjects viewed three selected tape segments rated as clearly conveying approval, no approval, or ambiguous remarks. The subjects were then asked to rate how they felt on an affective checklist. Half of the subjects in each A-B category were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: (1) Moderate Task Importance and (2) High Task Importance. Importance was manipluated by written and verbal instructions related to the importance of the assumed submitted paper in the vignettes.

Results

The approval and no approval scores, summed from the subjects' responses on the answer sheets to the 52 stimulus vignettes, were analyzed by a 2x2x2 (Type A/B x High/Moderate Importance x Approval/No Approval) repeated measures analysis of variance, with the approval scores serving as the repeated dependent measure. Results of the analysis of variance indicated that there was a significant three-way interaction for Type x Importance x Approval, F (1, 122) = 11.46, $p < .0001$. A pronounced difference between Type A and Type B responses to approval-rated stimulus vignettes in both High and Moderate Importance conditions can be observed in Figure 1. Selected multiple comparisons among the groups show that Type A's in the High Importance condition responded with significantly less confidence that approval had in fact been given than did Type B's, t (122) = 17.2236, $p < .0001$. Moderate Importance A's and B's also differed significantly in their responses to the approval-rated vignettes, t (122) = 9.0554, $p < .0001$, with Type A's again being less sure that approval had been given. Type A's and Type B's, in neither importance conditions, differed significantly in their responses to the no approval-rated vignettes (p's > .10). The remaining two-way interactions and main effects were all highly significant (p's < .0001).

The affective checklist items were included in order to inquire about what the subjects may be feeling during the selected videotape vignettes (Approval, No Approval, Ambiguous). In other words, how the subjects affectively respond to and interpret an approval message versus an ambiguous message versus a no approval message. The affect measure consisted of eleven semantic differential-type 7-point Likert-scales designed to assess the affective dimension of the subject as they experienced the selected sample approval, no approval, or ambiguous remark. Each set of items consisted of a pair of characteristics describing opposite feelings. Subjects were requested to choose a number which described where they fell on the scale in relation to the particular selected vignette. Item pairs were as follows: happy/sad; approved of/disapproved of; intelligent/unintelligent; capable/incapable; relaxed/tense; self-confident/unsure; indifferent to others' approval/highly needful of others' approval; not at all aware of feelings of others/very aware of feelings of others; hardworking/lazy; easily understood/incomprehensible; competitive/not at all competitive.

These response items were included as dependent measures and were subjected to a 2x2x3 (Type A/B x High/Moderate Importance x Vignettes: Approval/Ambiguous/No Approval) repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance, with the Vignettes being the repeated measure. Since several factors within the MANOVA were found to be significant, an examination of the appropriate univariate analyses of variance was possible.

The univariate analysis for the affective checklist item: "Approved of versus Disapproved of" revealed a significant two-way interaction for Type A/B x Vignettes, F (2,228) = 67.63, $p < .0001$. Figure 2 presents the pattern of the interaction. The ANOVA also revealed significant main effects for Type, F (1, 114) = 58.08, $p < .0001$, and for Vignettes, F (2, 228) = 1211.19, $p < .0001$. The most meaningful contrasts involved ascertaining whether Type A's and B's differed in

their reactions to approval, ambiguous, or no approval messages. Type A's and B's did not differ significantly when presented selected vignettes that had been rated as clearly conveying approval or no approval messages. However, Type A's, when presented the selected vignette rated as clearly being ambiguous, responded that they felt significantly ($p < .0001$) more "disapproved of" than Type B's. This particular selected vignette had been rated previously as reflecting approval generally, when raters could only choose between approval or no approval categories. This result suggests that when Type A's are confronted with ambiguity within an approval message, they report feeling disapproval rather than approval. Type B's, on the other hand, appear to treat ambiguity within the approval message, as ambiguity. That is, they report feeling relatively no more approved of or disapproved of.

Further investigations of the univariate analyses of variance revealed some additional findings. Type A's reported feeling more needful of others' approval, more hardworking, and more tense when the importance of the project was stressed (p's $< .05$), than did their Type B counterparts.

Discussion

The present findings provide a clearer understanding of the manner in which everyday confrontations, from person-situation interactions, are experienced by Type A and Type B college students. The data suggest that there are significant differences between how Type A's and B's respond to and interpret social cues in the form of approval-rated messages. They do not appear to differ in their perceptions of no approval-rated messages. The results indicate that Type A's, in the High Task Importance condition, and to a lesser extent in the Moderate Task Importance condition, responded to the approval-rated vignettes with significantly less certainty that approval had, in fact, been given, than did their Type B counterparts.

An assumption of the present study has been that if a person has an inability to appropriately detect social cues, for example approval, then the individual may be creating a source of additional stress in their everyday lives. These situations are particularly relevant when the social cues are ambiguous or unclear. Ambiguity or uncertainty can be perceived as a threat to certain individuals. It often leads to hesitation, unsureness, and indecision in one's personal actions. It represents unpredictability in the course of events.

When subjects were presented the three selected videotaped vignettes, Type A's and B's did not differ in their feelings of being approved of or disapproved of for either the approval-rated or the no approval-rated vignette. Each of these vignettes were selected because they clearly conveyed either approval or no approval messages to the students. On the other hand, Type A's and Type B's did clearly differ in their affective responses to the ambiguous-rated vignette, regardless of importance condition. Although this vignette was selected because graduate student raters indicated that it was clearly ambiguous in nature, previous psychology professor raters agreed on its placement within the approval messages, when asked to dichotomize the vignettes as either approval or no approval. When faced with ambiguity, Type A's indicated that they felt disapproved of, while Type B's indicated that they felt approved of, at least more approved of than did Type A's. Disapproval, by itself, may be thought of as a threat to one's self-esteem, and may be stressful by nature. Disapproval denotes failure to many people; and failure as a threat to one's sense of control is stressful. As previosly noted, Glass (1977) has suggested that Type A's appear to be sensitive to any perceived threats to loss of control.

If it is the nature of Type A's to misinterpret social cues of approval, as disapproval, when the cues are ambiguous or unclear to them, then possibly this is one reason they continue to strive hard and overwork themselves. When faced with uncertainty, or equivocal interpretaions, the Type A individual may find

more meaning in accepting the disapproval. For to accept the ambiguous message as an indication of approval, may leave them unprepared, if they later discover themselves or their work not approved of. Hard-drivingness and excessive achievement striving is the way of life for the Type A. Since Type A individuals appear to value the esteem of significant others (Matthews, Helmreich,Beane, & Lucker,1980) and are very responsive to situations of an evaluative or competitive nature (Friedman, 1969), they may find more security in accepting, at first, the disapproval; for they can, through their hard-driving efforts, achieve the approval they are seeking. If they risk accepting the ambiguous cues as approval, then they find themselves ill-prepared, if later they discover that disapproval was the intent of the message.

Some of the above notions appear to be further validated from subjects' responses to the affective checklist. Type A's indicated that they felt more needful of others' approval, regardless of importance condition or type of vignette presented, than did the Type B's. Type A's also responded that they regarded themselves as more hardworking than did their Type B counterparts; again, regardless of importance condition of type of vignette presented. Type A's as compared to Type B's, reported feeling more relaxed, when the project importance was not stressed. The A's in the Moderate Importance condition were also more relaxed than the A's in the High Importance condition. As the importance of their assumed project increased, Type A's evidently reported feeling more tense. Type B's did not report feeling any more tense or relaxed when the importance was manipulated.

It seems reasonable that Type A's would direct their efforts into producing superior work that wins the esteem of significant others (e.g., professors, supervisors, respected colleagues). From the research alluded to above, it appears that Type A's make difficult demands on themselves and these demands contribute significantly to their day to day stress. If these demands occur repeatedly, over the lifetime of the individual, they would subject the cardiovascular

system to substantial physical loads on a daily basis, which might result in eventual heart disease (Williams, 1975).

It is possible that reductions in the type of day-to-day stress that is potentially damaging to the cardiovascular system can have a significant clinical impact in the long run. For example, we know from the research of Dembroski et al. (1978) that Type A subjects may be more prone than their Type B counterparts to respond to many everyday social, physical, and work related challenges with greater sympathetic nervous system (SNS) arousal. Additional evidence is available from research by Dembroski (Note 1), which showed that Type A's compared to Type B's displayed elevated levels of catecholamines during their working day, in response to the challenge of a competitive contest, and during submaximal exercise stress. Other data from Dembroski (Note 1) and Pittner and Houston (1980) suggest that Type A's do not recognize their SNS arousal level as unusual. The data in this study do suggest that Type A's may be susceptible to overworking, overcompensating in their efforts to achieve the social approval from significant others in their everyday world.

The clinical picture of the Type A individual is one characterized by many of the traits thought to be strengths in today's world, and not one characterized by distress. Research indicates that Type A behavior may be an integral factor in the modern occupational career, and a number of independent studies found Type A behavior positively correlated with socioeconomic status as defined by education and occupation (see Zyzanski, 1979, for review). Therefore, Type A's do not appear likely to consider themselves candidates for psychological treatment. Rosenman (1977) points out that the Type A person rarely despairs of losing the chronic struggle, so that fear or anxiety over actual or potential failure is seldom seen in the Type A patient. Further, if Type A subjects are in treatment, it may be difficult to motivate them to change their Type A behaviors when they are not experiencing psychological symptoms and when their behavior is being

socially reinforced (Chesney, Black, Feuerstein, Rosenman, Colligan, & Chadwick, Note 2). Friedman and Rosenman (1974) emphasized that the Type A individual wants to avoid heart disease, not change his or her lifestyle. This fact makes the Type A personality one of the most difficult personalities to work with because it is the lifestyle and personality that are stressful. When realizing that a lifestyle change is indicated, the Type A who is trying to modify that behavior may quit in frustration. For the Type A person, that fact may be the hardest for them to face, but once they realize it, change can successfully occur. Changing Type A behavior does not mean giving up the desire to achieve or excel. It does mean changing to achieving and excelling behavior that is more healthfully appropriate. To make the Type A individual aware and insightful to the fact that they do not have to give up their social and personal rewards, that they can continue achieving and excelling, and as a consequence receive a more healthful life is crucial! The evidence appears to point to the Type A behavior pattern as being a learned behavior. As such, it can be unlearned or at least modified.

Because of the physiological cost of accomplishment, we need some means of offsetting inappropriate reactions in all phases of life to protect and enhance our health. Many adults, however, do not want to change their habitual reaction to stressors any more than they want to change their eating and/or activity patterns even though those behaviors cause pain, illness, or at best, are destructive to their quality of living. The key is motivation for and commitment to healthful well-being!

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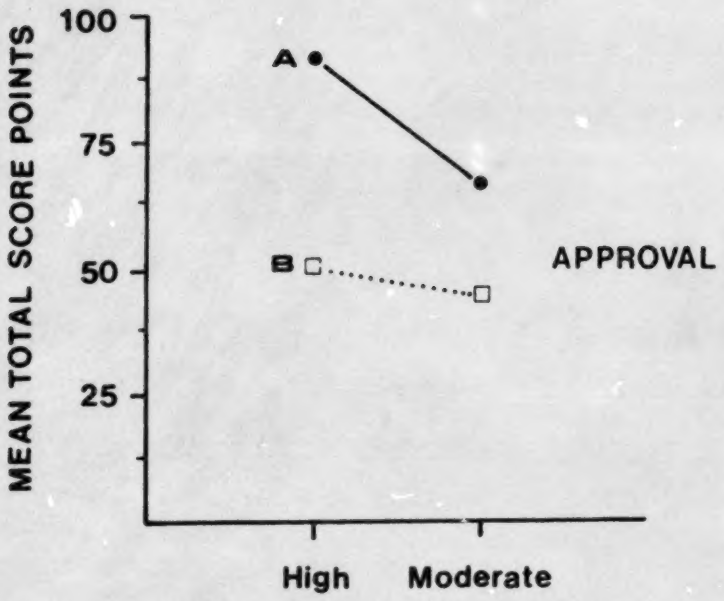
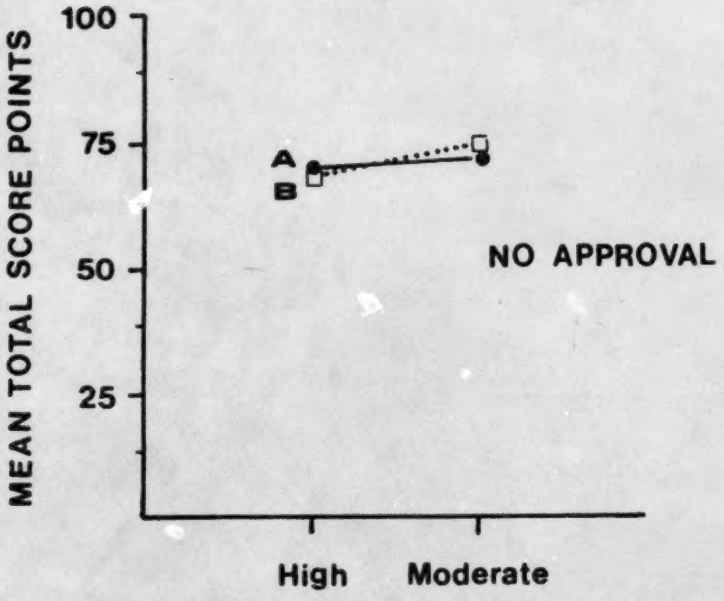


(Note: The lower the number the more sure approval is being conveyed)



(Note: The lower the number the more sure no approval is being conveyed)

Figure 1. Type A/B x High/Moderate Importance x Approval/No Approval responses to stimulus vignettes.

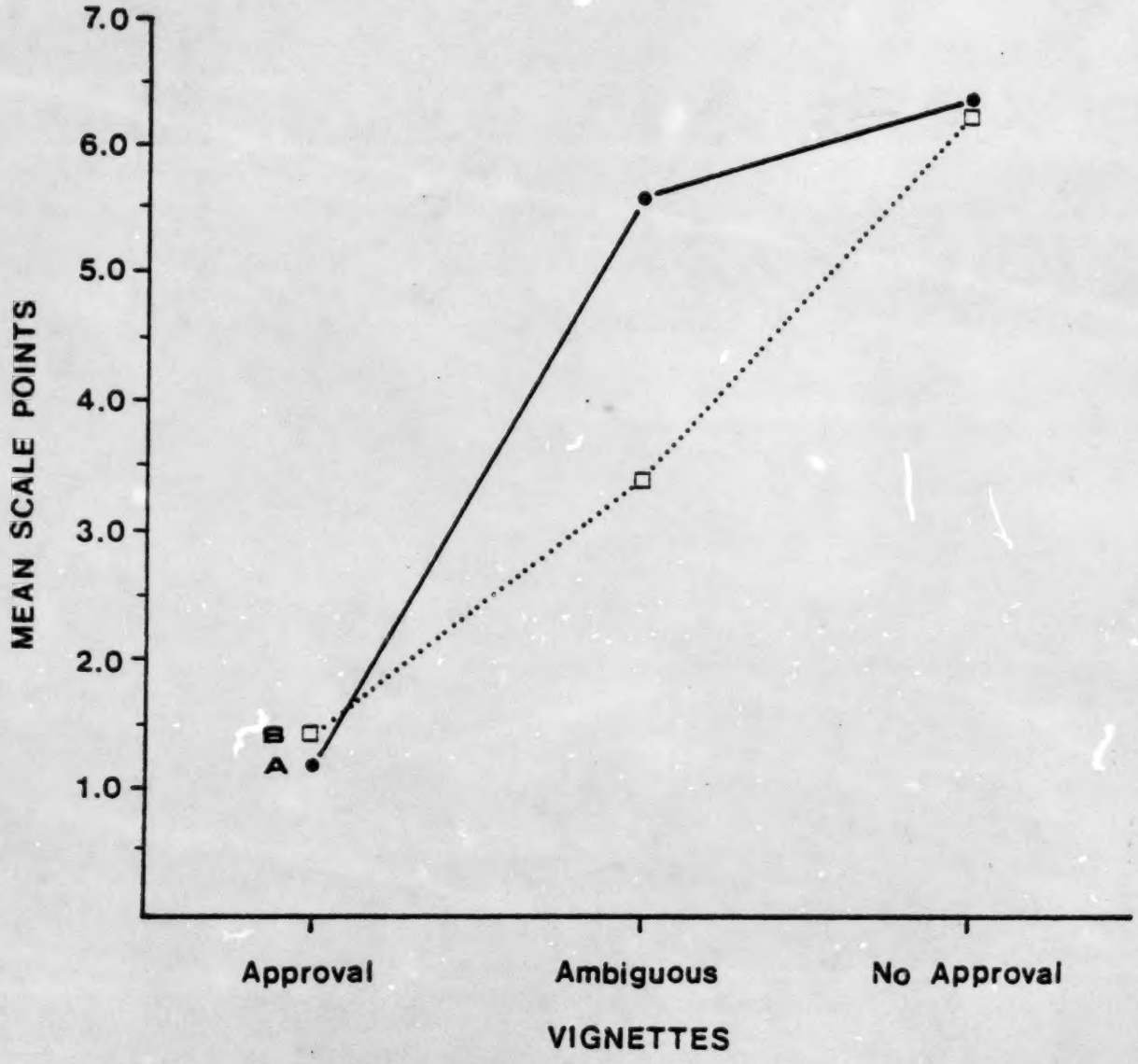


Figure 2. Type A/B x Vignettes interaction on affective checklist responses to Approved of/ Disapproved of.